

Guidance for effective communication with persons who are Deaf, Blind or Physically Disabled.

- ✦ **BE POLITE** - Show the person the same respect that you would expect to be given you.
- ✦ **BE CONSIDERATE** - Be patient, take time to listen.
- ✦ **COMMUNICATE**-Talk directly to the person.
- ✦ **EMERGENCY ACTION** - Be aware of people with disabilities during an emergency situation or evacuation.

Deaf or Hard of Hearing

When communicating with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing:

- ✦ Be considerate and try to make the person feel comfortable and confident in dealing with you.
- ✦ Look directly at the person to whom you are speaking. Speak normally - the person may or may not lip-read. If a sign-language interpreter is present, talk directly to the deaf person - not to the interpreter.
- ✦ Be flexible with your language. If a word is not understood, try another word rather than simply repeating yourself.
- ✦ Do not assume everything you have said, is understood. They may have only received 70% of your verbal communication. (A nod of the head does not necessarily mean "I understand".)
- ✦ Do not shout or speak loudly. Hearing aids make sounds louder, not more clear.
- ✦ Simple, general sign language may be used.
- ✦ You may use pen and paper or a computer to communicate, or choose to hire a licensed interpreter.

Blind or Low Vision

- ✦ People who are blind or low vision rely on their other senses to perceive the world around them. When you are with a person who is blind or low vision:
- ✦ Speak directly to the person, using a normal tone of voice.
- ✦ Do not be afraid to use terms such as "See you soon."
- ✦ Offer assistance but be guided by the individual's response.
- ✦ Be specific in giving directions. It is useless to point or give visual landmarks. If the individual must make a turn, state whether it should be left or right.
- ✦ Walk alongside and slightly ahead of the blind or low vision person you are assisting. Never hold the person's arm while walking. Let the blind person hold your arm. The motion of your body tells the person what to expect.
- ✦ Avoid escalators or revolving doors, if possible.
- ✦ Assist the individual on stairs by guiding a hand to the banister. When giving assistance in seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat.
- ✦ Never leave a blind person in an open area. Instead, lead the person to the side of the room or to a chair or some landmark from which he or she can obtain a direction for travel.
- ✦ Do not leave a blind person abruptly after talking in a crowd - or where there is noise that may obstruct the persons hearing - without saying that you are leaving. Otherwise, the blind person may be talking when no one is listening or even present.
- ✦ Do not pet a guide dog. The dog has an important job to do and petting may be distracting.

Physical Disabilities

When you are with a person using a wheelchair:

- ✦ Talk directly to the person in the wheelchair, rather than to someone else. People in wheelchairs are fully capable of speaking for themselves. Get on the individual's level if possible, kneeling on one knee, sitting in a chair, etc. If these are not possible, stand back from them so they don't have to look sharply upwards.
- ✦ In greeting a person, feel free to extend your hand to shake hands. Use a gentle grip and do not squeeze.
- ✦ Push a wheelchair only after asking the person if assistance is needed.
- ✦ When assisting someone in a wheelchair to go up or down a curb, ask if the person prefers to go forward or backward.
- ✦ In guiding a wheelchair down an incline, hold the push handles so that the chair does not go too fast.
- ✦ Learn the location of wheelchair accessible ramps, rest rooms, elevators and telephones.
- ✦ To assist a person who is ambulatory, ask them if they need assistance. It may mean help up from a chair or stability while walking. **DO NOT JUST GRAB THEIR ARMS.**
- ✦ Do not lean against or hang on someone's wheelchair.

Speech Disability

When you are communicating with a person who has a speech disability:

- ✦ Be yourself.
- ✦ Speak directly to the individual, not to a friend or companion.
- ✦ Try to give your whole, unhurried attention if the person has difficulty speaking.
- ✦ Do not complete the speaker's sentences. Let the person finish.
- ✦ Act courteously.
- ✦ Do not be afraid to ask the person to repeat something.
- ✦ If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod or shake of the head.

Improper Terminology

Here are some terms which may be offensive, and should be avoided, when speaking to, or about, people with disabilities.

Normal	Handicapped
Crippled	Palsied
Epileptic	Retarded
Confined to a Wheelchair	
Deaf and Dumb or Deaf Mute	

Additional Improper terms which could be interpreted as pity terms:

Afflicted	Suffering
Courageous	Unfortunate
Poor	Victim

Proper Terminology

People who are:

Blind or Low Vision
 Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Use "Person-first" language.

(Ex: Person who uses a wheelchair.)

Cerebral Palsy
 Down Syndrome
 Head Injury
 Mental Disability
 Multiple Sclerosis
 Muscular Dystrophy
 Paraplegia, Quadriplegia
 Physically Disabled
 Seizure Disorder
 Speech Disability